

How do I handle “power struggles” with my child?

In the beginning of life, children are solely dependent on their parents for care, support, and love. As they begin to grow and develop, they begin to slowly exercise power and control over their own lives until they mature into independent adults. Many parents find themselves engulfed in power struggles as their children forcibly strive for autonomy. It's normal and healthy for children to want to make decisions for themselves, but the key is providing a balance between independence and the guidance and structure that children continue to need. One way of doing this is by offering age-appropriate choices such as picking their own snack, choosing what to wear (within reason), and how to arrange their bedroom. When parents allow their children to make small decisions that are important to them, their self-esteem and confidence grow. When it comes to more important issues involving their safety, your child will be more likely to comply having been provided with some latitude previously.

Parents are encouraged to keep in mind that these struggles will often involve tools of negotiation and compromise. Providing a small amount of decision making can lead to larger amounts of it when children demonstrate responsibility. Letting go of certain battles and holding onto others is important to consider. Remaining patient and firm when warranted will ultimately benefit both you and your child during these frustrating sessions. Parent-child struggles should not dominate your relationship; working together and communicating will ultimately benefit the situation.